

Press Release

January 23, 2015

From the Steering Committee of a coalition of Indianapolis Neighborhood Organizations (names and contact information below)

For Immediate Release

A growing coalition of Neighborhood Organizations throughout Indianapolis have been coming together to oppose Council Proposal 250. We intend to testify against this proposal at Monday night's City-County Council's Metropolitan & Economic Development committee meeting. Councillor Leroy Robinson, Chairman of the committee, has granted us 30 minutes for a presentation of our position.

Our overall position is that both the Proposal and the lack of a transparent, vigorous public process are unacceptable.

Prop 250 was written by the billboard industry and serves their purposes. They have been lobbying members of the City-County Council behind closed doors for over 3 years. The proposed changes to the ordinance are so heavily weighted to the benefit of the billboard companies, and are so flawed, that it is not salvageable.

Prop 250 would allow 75 digital billboards in the first 3 years. The proposal then allows further growth that would be irreversible.

The Department of Metropolitan Development has for some time had plans to review the entire Sign Ordinance, once Indy Rezone was complete. DMD is the appropriate place to initiate any changes to billboard regulations - not the Council. DMD's approach to a transparent public process is well respected by Neighborhoods.

Marjorie Kienle, President of Historic Urban Neighborhoods of Indianapolis, says, " Since the Department of Metropolitan Development anticipates a rewrite of our entire Sign Ordinance after Indy Rezone is complete, there is no earthly reason for the Council to interject this Proposal now. This is especially true because the changes Councillors are considering were written by the billboard industry to serve, not to regulate, that industry."

Councillor Jeff Miller, who sits on the MED committee, agrees. "Ever since I first heard about the proposed changes to the billboard ordinance, I have been emphatic that the public must be included. Now that Neighborhood Organizations have become aware of what is being proposed, they are telling me and my colleagues that they cannot support this proposal in the current form. It is my understanding that DMD already has plans to review the entire Sign Ordinance once Indy ReZone is complete. If that is the case, then that is where any change to the billboard regulations should properly be taken up."

"I'm finding there is uniform opposition across the county to this industry written proposal. It's a quality of life issue, and residents have no appetite for more intrusive advertising", says Ed Locke, Board Member of the Pike Township Residents Association.

Others think that the swapout ratio (the number of static billboard faces that must be taken down in exchange for putting up a digital face) is far too low to be considered. "Other cities that decided to go digital, have required far better swapout ratios in order to make a real dent in the total number of billboards. St. Pete got nearly 15 to 1. Are we really considering 2 to 1?", asked Pat Andrews, Vice President of the Decatur Township Civic Council.

Norm Pace, Land Use Chair for both McANA and the Warren Township Development Association, reflects on the illegally erected billboards, "We know there are illegal billboards in the City. It would be unfair for a billboard company to swap out a billboard that shouldn't even exist, for a digital one."

Deficiencies in the proposed ordinance include:

- these giant TV screens could be within 500 feet of a home

- illegally erected billboards could be taken down as a swap for digital ones. There are billboards in the City for which there are either no permits or the orientation of the face is to the wrong street. Under Prop 250, a billboard company could get swapout credit for removing one of these non-permitted billboards. That is unfair.

- a series of digital billboards, staggered no more than 500 feet from each other, could asynchronously change ad copy every 8 seconds in a single line of sight - challenging driving safety

- interactive billboards and sequential ads (ala the old Burma Shave signs) would be allowed - both bad practices that impact safety on the road

- of no small matter, the taxpayers could be on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars should a Court overturn the proposed ordinance because only certain billboard companies are allowed to convert to digital, or if the Court overturns a 2007 rule by the Federal Highway Administration. In 2013, the Minnesota DOT paid \$4.5 M to Clear Channel to remove one digital billboard, and Clear Channel got to keep the billboard itself.

David Hittle, Land Use Chairman for the Near Eastside Community Organization puts it this way, "The proposed digital billboard zoning ordinance - remarkably - was written by the billboard industry. A regulation written by the very industry it purports to regulate, unprecedented among Indianapolis's zoning ordinances, would garner little confidence with the public. And, far from asking for the introduction of digital billboards to city streets, Indy neighborhoods overwhelmingly oppose it. In fact, no one but the billboard industry, which stands to gain a windfall, is asking for this. Yet here it is."

Cathy Burton, President of the Marion County Alliance of Neighborhood Associations reflected upon the lack of a vigorous public process for Prop 250. "Public debate can be uncomfortable, time consuming and emotional, but there is nothing more essential to examining and understanding all of the options and impacts of an issue."

The coalition has employed a couple of short phrases that capture the general opinion of Prop 250.

*The consensus position within our coalition is that both the proposed ordinance, and the path it's traveled thus far, are unacceptable.*

*Even if you like digital billboards... you should hate Proposal 250.*

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Organizations that are part of the Coalition of Indianapolis Neighborhood Organizations (those whose schedules have allowed them to take a formal position since our January 7 general meeting on Prop 250)

Decatur Township Civic Council

South Wayne Neighborhood Organization

Warren Township Development Association

Far Eastside Neighborhood Association (FENA)

Lockerbie Square Peoples Club

Woodruff Place Civic Association

St. Joseph Neighborhood Association

Historic Meridian Park

Meridian-Kessler Neighborhood Association (MKNA)

Near East Side Community Organization (NESCO)

Butler Tarkington Neighborhood Association

Near East Area Renewal (NEAR)

Pike Township Residents Association (PTRA)

Meridian Kessler Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Fletcher Place Neighborhood Association

Community Heights Neighborhood Organization

Eastgate Neighborhood Association, Inc.

Historic Urban Neighborhoods of Indianapolis (HUNI)

Old Speedway City Neighborhood Association

Marion County Alliance of Neighborhood Associations (McANA)

East 10th Street Civic Association

Cottage Home Neighborhood Association

Keystone Millersville Association, Inc.

Town of Cumberland